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david duke, duke, duke, duke: the earl of racial politics



Jus' lookit that politician there, with the rosy cheeks and toothy smile. So tall he is, and a good Christian, too! He's bouncin' babies and shakin' hands, talkin' 'bout God and country. He's fed up with the corrupt fat cats—says they're sellin' out the USA to foreigners. He'll stamp out crime and boost education. He'll protect veterans, the handicapped, the elderly, and the environment. He wants lower taxes and equal rights for all.

Does it matter that he's the most hated man in America? At forty-one, David Ernest Duke doesn't have a few skeletons in his closet, he has a whole cemetery. He's been a student and proponent of white supremacy since his early teens. While his college peers were quoting Mao, he worshipped Uncle Adolf and sometimes strolled the campus in a Nazi uniform. He became a grand wizard of the KKK in his mid-twenties. To compile a mailing list of black radicals, he wrote a handbook for street-fighting militants under the pseudonym "Mohammed X." Calling himself "Dorothy Vanderbilt," he penned "Finders Keepers," a how-to-please-your-man guide for women which gave pointers on anal sex and described vaginal exercises. By 1980, he had quit the Klan and formed the National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP). He's the man primarily responsible for dressing the white-power movement in a business suit.

He "went legit" in 1989, squeaking into Louisiana's state legislature by two hundred and twenty-seven votes. He simultaneously softened the pricklier edges of his racist rhetoric. Last year he was nearly elected Louisiana's governor on his way to becoming one of America's most visible politicians—almost everyone knows who David Duke is, but few can name the guy who beat him.

In their mealy-mouthed indignation, his enemies are aghast that he's come this far. They can't understand why all the rednecks are so pissed. It's simple—name another politician who speaks openly for working-class whites.

Can't, can you? The general perception, justified or not, is that Republicans care about rich whites while Democrats cater to poor blacks. David Duke belongs to the Republican Party (much to its chagrin), but his message is pure populism.

His main target, affirmative action, triggers deeply emotional responses among voters. The program's purpose was to redress inequities caused by slavery. Its fatal flaw is that it doesn't bleed plantation owners, it harms working whites through higher taxes and reduced services. White anger may be misplaced, but it's genuine.

There's an old liberal fiction which implies that all whites are oppressors. Yeah, blacks have had it harder in this country, but that doesn't mean that all Caucasians have had a cakewalk. You'd be kidding yourself to think that the tractor drivers, gas pumpers, and trailer dwellers who form Duke's core of support are the lords of the global village.

The lib-chic press only compounds the problem. It acts as the guardian of rain-forest Indians but has only contempt for low-income whites in its own neighborhood. It'll embrace Louis Farrakhan's rhetoric about black economic empowerment but politely ignores his insane myths about whites having been created by an evil scientist. In the liberals' book, you can act like an asshole as long as you're perceived as a victim. And the possibility that genetic differences exist between the races—*whoever* comes out on top—is all but forbidden as a topic of debate.

Lest you think that *ANSWER Me!*'s editors are storm troopers for *der Führer*, I find it necessary to state that we're not racists. We hate *everybody* equally. Our only problem with Hitler is that he was too specific. If he'd called for an across-the-board holocaust, we'd be waving swastika pennants. Debbie's Jewish, but she doesn't like to talk about *that*. We'll never have kids, refuse to align ourselves with communal

movements, and don't get along with anyone anyway, so we don't feel like we own a ticket in the racial sweepstakes.

I spoke with David Duke in a phone call placed to his headquarters just outside of New Orleans. In a sugary drawl, he responded to many questions as if reciting from a campaign speech. At times I felt as if I'd plugged into an automated phone system: "*For my opinion on forced busing, press nine now...*" Duke is a telegenic media cyborg, mannequinlike in his tailored palatability. And, yes, he's a shameless manipulator of public unrest, but what politician isn't?

Human beings, like water buffalo, tend to stay with their own kind and attack those who look different. Visit any jail and this becomes uncomfortably obvious. Yet some still cling to the silly notion that hatred can be cured as if it were muscular dystrophy. The world as we knew it is shattering into an ugly pile of jagged tribal shards. If you think you know how to stop this, your ego is bigger than your brain.

A lot of people seem terrified of you. Why do you think that is?

Well, I think it's been 'cause of a lot of the sensational media painting of me. You know, I was certainly in the Klan years ago, but I never committed any violent acts whatsoever, and I've always condemned that kind of behavior. I was certainly too intolerant, but I've grown beyond that, and I think that there's a double standard of the media when it comes to David Duke. Clarence Thomas was once associated with the Black Panthers—that's at least according to *Time* magazine. He wore a Black Panther beret, he helped take over university campuses, and even his worst liberal critics never said he shouldn't serve on the Supreme Court because of his black racist positions at one time, so, you know? Ronald Reagan was a socialist up until his forties. And I mean an open socialist—advocacy of socialism. He was one of the founding members of the United World Federalists and one of the World Socialists Organization. He was a charter member of Americans for Democratic Action, which was openly socialist. So, I mean, I think there's a double standard, and I can understand why people—*some* people—might be afraid of me by getting one side of the story.

I definitely agree with you that there's hypocrisy in the media—it seems the only acceptable racial slur is "white trash."

Well, that's right, or "honky," or whatever. I mean, there's a political correctness that goes beyond simply some speech on campuses. There's a political correctness that pervades most of our national media in America.

Describe the typical David Duke supporter.

Well, at least we did very well in the elections



PHOTO BY MITCHELL OSBORNE

Dave as a fired-up young white guy.

here in Louisiana. We had a good cross section. I represent a district that's the highest educated and the highest income district in the state, highest Republican percentage in the state, and I won a majority of the Republican votes. I also won a great section, or a great sector, of Democratic working people. My district is mostly Catholic—I think I have a good cross section of all the different groups that make up the country. I didn't have a tremendous amount of black support. I only got about four percent of the black vote, which is consistent with what Bush got when he ran here, consistent to what David Treen received, the former governor, but no Republican candidate gets much of the black bloc vote. But we have a very sizeable percentage of black bloc vote here in Louisiana, bigger than

any other state except for one [Mississippi]. That's why I lost the general election.

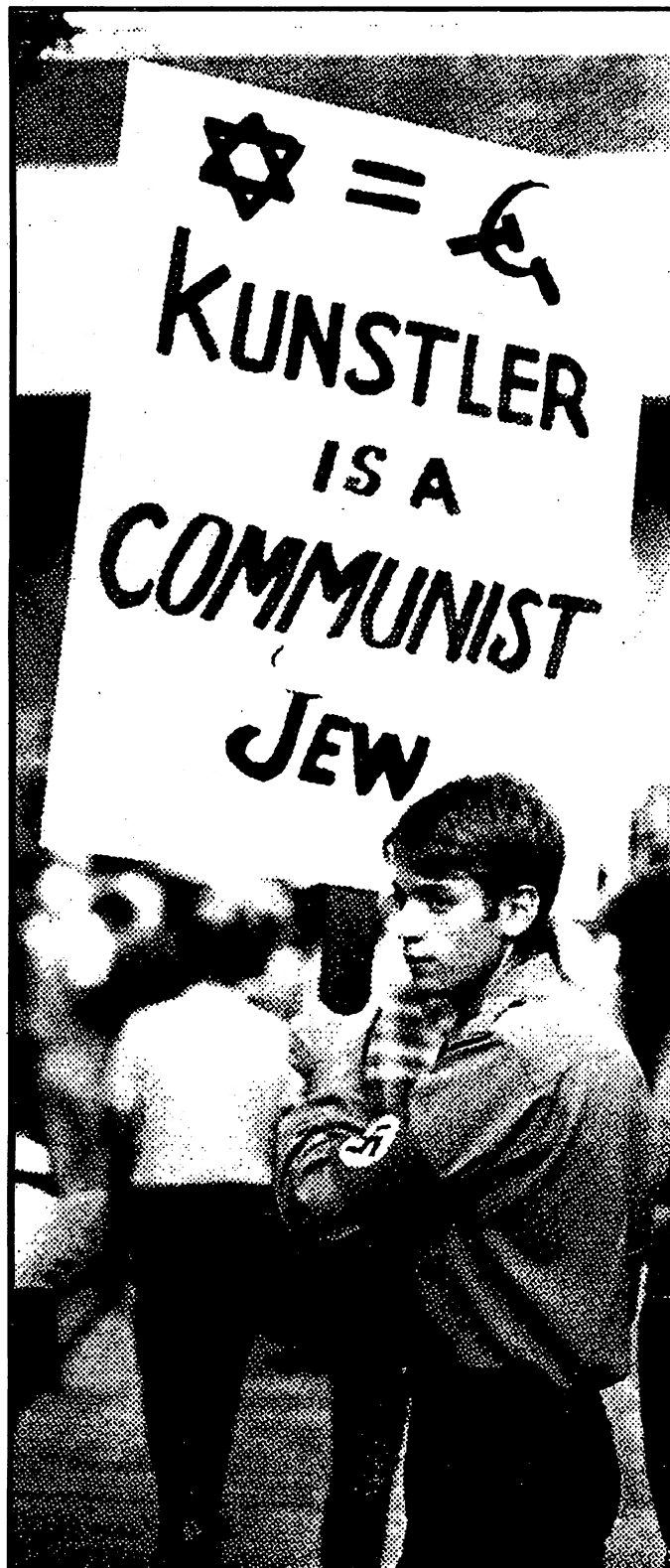
The black vote?

Well, it's the primary issue, yes. I won about fifty-six percent of the white vote statewide.

You've often spoken about "Western civilization," "Christian values," and "our heritage." Exactly what are you talking about, and why should these things be preserved?

I'm talking about precisely that. I mean, certainly, if you said, "What is Western civilization?" I guess it's the body of culture that European civilization's produced. And it could be represented by many. You could talk about William Shakespeare, or you could talk about

Hegel, or you could talk Goethe or Locke, Burke, and Hume. There's just so many things you could speak about. You could speak about the music of Mozart, or you could talk about Renaissance architecture or Gothic architecture. I mean, there's so many things, but Western Christian civilization is an entity. It is a reality, and it's a culture and civilization as much as the classical civilizations were of Greece and Rome, even though we borrowed much from them. Or the Egyptian civilization, or the Mesopotamian, or the civilization of ancient India—we have a thread of culture that goes before us. We're overwhelmingly a Christian country,



The biggest mistake Dave ever made.

and I think that the fact that we've gotten away from some of those Christian principles and values is one of the reasons why we've suffered as a nation.

You've referred to your well-publicized past as "youthful indiscretion"—

—Well, let me just say something to you. Let me correct something—

Let me just—

—It's been reprinted a thousand times. I never said that. I've never called my past youthful indiscretions. The *media* called it youthful indiscretions, and that's repeated a thousand times.

OK, fair enough, I'll accept that—

—I call my past, you know, mistakes, not indiscretions. And my opinions, I've changed a lot of my opinions in my life.

OK, I guess the core of the question was, if indeed you've had a change of heart, when was it and what caused it? And also, is it truly possible to escape your past?

I don't think it's possible for anyone to escape the past. We're all made up of what we do in the past. But we have a possibility for change in our lives. And I did not have a road-to-Damascus experience, I had a gradual transition, and I think as people get older, they become a lot more moderate and a lot more tolerant and forgiving. I tended to blame minorities for a lot of the conditions in that community, and now I tend more to blame the liberal social-welfare system which has *created* a lot of those conditions, which has encouraged dependency rather than independence, which has encouraged illegitimacy. It's allowed drug dealers and drug users to control neighborhoods where children grow up in that environment, and, you know, I think that we've got to change those fundamentals in America. You know, I have a lot of the same beliefs that I had as a young man. I still believe in the Constitution. I still am opposed to forced busing—I think that's been damaging to education. I still am for less government and less taxes, but I'm certainly a lot more moderate, and I'm certainly, you know, much more tolerant of minorities, and I think that's something that normally takes place in people's lives when they get a little older and a little wiser.

You were quoted in the seventies as saying, "America is headed toward... more radical times." What did you mean?

I still tend to believe that America is headed for great trials, and I think that the liberal social-welfare programs have produced this disastrous situation in our cities, in our educational system. It's produced crime, drugs, violence, and it seems to me the government is still pursuing this. The government continues to grow. In fact, it's continuing to escalate. You know, we've had a few blips on the screen, but basically we're moving in the same direction we have for the last thirty years, and I think if those conditions continue, that we'll be in a much more volatile situation. I think crime will continue to grow, I think education problems will continue to mount, I think that the drug problem will not be significantly alleviated, and in those times I think people will be looking for, you know, very courageous and strong leaders.

What's the most unfair thing ever said about David Duke?

There's no way I could begin to *categorize* all the unfair things. It's just, the unfairness is their inconsistency. I mean, they accuse me of one thing one day and one thing the next. One day I'm a homosexual, next day I'm a womanizer. One day I'm a radical fanatic, next day I'm in it for money. It just goes on and on. It's a fact in this country when you can't argue with a man's ideas and when he has principles people believe in and you can't effectively fight his ideas, then you have to attack his character, and I

think that's what's happened to me.

But I think that in the zeal to attack my character, they've made me a household word, and they've actually propelled my ideas. Because people see that David Duke, who, you know, has a former Klan membership, and that's certainly [laughs], I guess, not the best accolade you could have in American politics, and they still *vote* for me in overwhelming numbers, that says to every other politician who does have a more sanitized background, it says, "Well, if David Duke can win on the strength of these issues with his background, I, too, can *talk* about them." And the one, I guess, great achievement that I've had over the last four years since I was elected to office has been that there's been a whole new public debate that has grown up and has been allowed because of that. There's a debate now on the social-welfare system that we have in this country. There's now a national debate on affirmative action after I used those issues for the first time effectively and successfully in a campaign. I saw the Democratic national presidential debate on NBC the other day, and they mentioned my name four times during the course of the debate in connection with my issues. I think that my issues are now becoming debated and discussed, and I think that can only help move people *toward* them.

Which of your ideas would you consider unassailable? You said they can't really attack your ideas.

I think they have a very difficult time attacking the fact that I believe in equal rights for all and that human rights must be for everybody in this country and that if discrimination against blacks or other minorities is immoral, then certainly, on a moral level, it's just as immoral to discriminate against a *white*. And human rights have to be for everyone. And there are poor blacks and there are poor whites, and there are blacks from broken families and whites from broken families. So I think that really, I think that affirmative action, when it's really discussed thoroughly, is an indefensible position. It's a very racist position that is very indefensible, because if people say that you want to help people who've got a tough environment, *fine*. Make environmental advantages, or environmental-assisting programs. But when you say white or black, what you end up doing is you discriminate, often in favor of the good environment over the bad. For instance, there are middle-class blacks. Why should a middle-class black be given more favorable treatment, say, over a white person who comes from a broken family and abject poverty, especially if the white child does better? So if you have a program based on your background and [the] environmental impact in your life, that's one

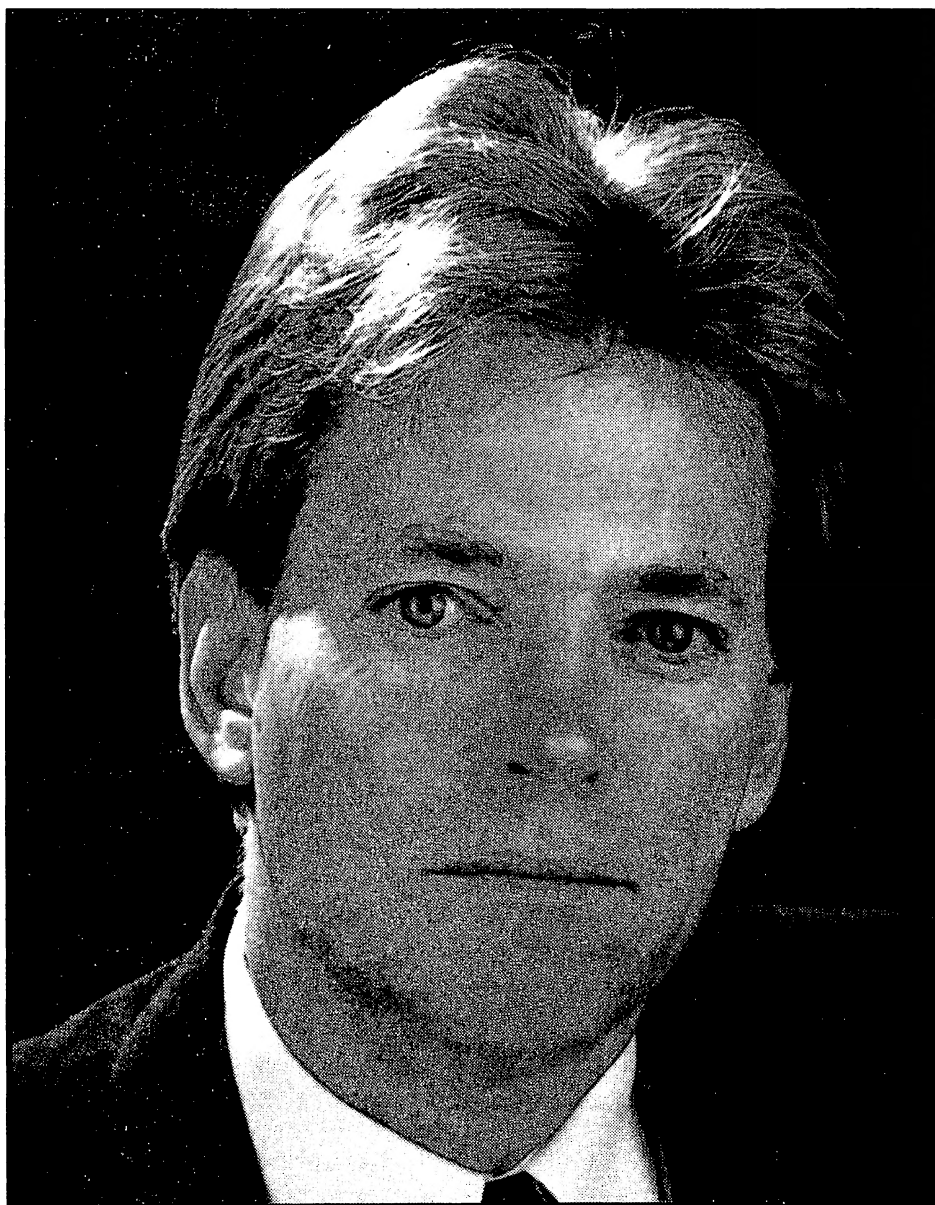


PHOTO COURTESY DAVID DUKE FOR PRESIDENT HEADQUARTERS

Dave 1992: kinder, gentler, and sincere as shit.

thing. So affirmative action has no real moral underpinning at all. It's a very racist program and it hasn't worked.

What would you say is the biggest mistake you've ever made?

The biggest mistake I ever made was putting on a swastika and picketing William Kunstler when I was nineteen years old for fifteen minutes. Kunstler was advocating victory for the Viet Cong in Vietnam and [was] a very open communist, and I was trying to figure out some way to call attention to him and what he was doing at Tulane, and I did that by myself for fifteen minutes, and that's caused me a lot of grief, and that was certainly a mistake. I shouldn't have done it—protested Kunstler in that way.

Have you always been a troublemaker?

No, I really haven't. I was a very good child. I

read an awful lot. I always have been, you know, pretty honest about what I've believed. I've always spoken up. I mean, if I believed in something, I would say it. I mean, I learned in Sunday school that if the crowd went the wrong way, then you had to stand up and say and do the right thing. And sometimes that causes some trouble when you see an injustice and you speak out about it. Or when you feel something passionately and you open your mouth and not just be quiet about it. So I don't mean to make trouble, but sometimes it *happens*. Sometimes there's certainly controversy when people debate key issues.

Is it true that blonds have more fun?

I wouldn't know. I've got light-brown hair, so I'm not a real blond. But I have one daughter that's blonde and one that's a brunette, and I couldn't say that the blonde has any more fun. ■